WHITE FIRE

By

Grace Noll Crowell

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GRACE NOLL CROWELL

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TO
MY THREE SONS

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Daily God binds His fagots
Of love and beauty
To feed the white fire of my spirit.

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WHITE FIRE

VISION

THERE is a shining wonder where men strive
Through gleaming days of sun and wind and soil,
For ever there lies beyond the commonplace
The imperishable dignity of toil.
Here is the splendor of the rugged land
Where stalwarts wrestle with the ancient sod;
The golden silences where men who will
May labor daily—hand in hand with God.

There is a radiance where women move
About small household tasks if they but see
Beyond the polished surface of old woods,
The amazing triumph of a living tree;
If they but see beyond the white, heaped flour,
Beyond the red-glassed jellies on a sill,
Wide, joyous wheat fields laughing in the sun—
God's face above an orchard on a hill.

FIRES THROUGH THE DUSK

IF it were not for little lights
Set high above the plain
When darkness comes, I think that there
Would be no ease for pain.

If never more a round bright moon
Would climb the hills at night,
A million hearts would turn and break
With longing for its light.

If no white candle anywhere
Would lift a tulip flame,
The grief—for Beauty's sake alone—
Could never have a name;

And if all firelight should cease,
And light no lifted face,
Each old loved room would be a bleak
Ungracious dwelling place;

And O, dear heart, if suddenly,
One little casement's glow
Should fail for me—the light would die
In the whole world, I know.

SILVER POPLARS

GOD wrote His loveliest poem on the day
He made the first tall silver poplar tree,
And set it high upon a pale-gold hill
For all the new enchanted earth to see.

I think its beauty must have made Him glad,
And that He smiled at it—and loved it so—
Then turned in sudden sheer delight and made
A dozen silver poplars in a row.

Mist-green and white against a turquoise sky,
A-shimmer and a-shine they stood at noon;
A misty silver loveliness at night
Breathless beneath the first small wistful moon.

And then God took the music of the winds,
And set each leaf a-flutter and a-thrill—
Today I read His poem word by word
Among the silver poplars on the hill.

SCARLET THREADS

A CARDINAL just whistled through the rain,
A sudden shower of golden notes that spilled
And mingled with the silver rain, and filled
The air with quivering joy. He splashed a stair
Of color through the mist upon the pane;
He wove within the grey woof of the day
Gay scarlet threads and left them there to stay;
A cardinal just whistled through the rain.

Such things as these have made the hours glad:
Some unexpected burst of loveliness—
Through somberness of toil, a snatch of play;
The breathless sweep of faith that I have had;
The glance of trust—a voice's swift caress—
So many things have made me glad today.

MUSIC-MAD

THE mocking bird is music-mad tonight,
He thinks the stars are notes;
That he must sing each spattered star, and be
A choir of many throats.

The earth is his cathedral, and its dome
Is all the light-pricked sky,
The pear tree is his choir loft, and there
He flings his mad song high.

The moon-white blossoms are young girls to him,
Who kneel at night to pray;
The buds, their rosaries—the little winds
Are whispered prayers they say.

He thinks he is the whole cathedral choir,
And bursts his little throat;
I lie awake—and do not breathe—lest I
May miss one single note.

WILD ASTERS

WE are no more than the dead leaves at your feet;
No more to you than the wind along the way;
You scarcely see us—blossoming blue and sweet—
In the roadside dust this late September day;
And yet—we know—some blue-gold afternoon—
Perhaps tomorrow—perhaps in a thousand years—
You will turn with broken breath—though late or soon,
To find us glimmering through a wash of tears.

For hearts have queer ways of remembering
Unnoted little things of past bright hours;
They draw strange comfort from—a lifted wing—
A bough of leaves—a clump of wayside flowers.
Great loves may be forgotten—and great fears—
But some small thing will cling a thousand years.

WHITE FIRE

THE first star burns like white fire on the hill;
Listen, my heart, did some one call my name?
"Through the blue dusk—a voicing whippoorwill;
In the primrose west, there is only a white star's flame."
How does the aching beauty of this hour
Recall to me an unremembered thing?
O heart, why do you turn like a swaying flower?
I wonder, little wild night bird, how you can sing?

A pale moth beats its wings at a lattice bar;
The petals of a moon-flower have unfurled;
Close to the waiting star—a radiant star—
Has leaped to his love across a chasmed world.
(O heart, be like a star—steadfast and bright—
Two fires are burning on the hill tonight.)

WET LILACS

I COULD cry with the sweetness of this April hour,
My heart could break with this poignant pain.
I close my eyes, and I breathe again
Lilacs wet with rain.

The air is burdened with a moist perfume,
I am faint in my soul with remembering
Wet purple plumes in the fragrant dusk
Of another far off spring.

Love, your footsteps come over the grass
Near as the sound of the dripping eaves.
Love, your breath on my hair is sweet
As the tender lilac leaves.

I am blind with your lips locked close to mine,
In the twilight—wet with the rain's own tears—
O Love, can it be—you have come back—
Out of the silent years?

THE POET

OUT of the highest agonies of pain;
Out of the holiest sorrows he must come;
From passion unto passion he must gain
The heights beyond the heights—and standing dumb
Within the awful silence of the past,
Burst into song—so winged with flame—so free—
That every tired heart will say: "At last—
Some one has found my voice—and sings for me."

PRAYER AFTER PAIN

HOW can he thank Thee, Lord, for the good grain
Who has not conquered thistle and briar and weed?
How can he thank Thee for the sweet wild rain
Who has not trod parched lands above dead seed?
How can he lift a grateful heart for peace
Who has not known some red-lit battlefield?
O Lord, how can he comprehend release
Who has not felt at last an old wound healed?

Out of earth's agony white flowers shine;
Above the old scarred fields wild grasses run;
Out of the crushed fruits of the sun comes wine,
Out of the night—the morning star—the sun.
For every hour of pain that we have had—
Even for these—Lord help us to be glad.

WINDY TWILIGHT

TO feel again the dusk wind blowing
Cold and wet on my lifted face;
To see once more a late light glowing
Through tossed willows' delicate lace;
To hear the swish of the tumbling grasses;
To glimpse a scurrying cloud's high wing;
To clamber a hill that the old road passes—
I love it—O, more than anything.

To climb where mist-wet boughs are tossing;
To stand at last on the gusty crest,
Marking a low red sky-line crossing
A thread of color along the west;
To thrill with an old glad exultation,
Like a flame—like a cry—like a song to sing—
To be one with the wind's own mad elation,
O, heart—it is a wonderful thing.

I GRIEVE FOR BEAUTY WASTED

ALWAYS I am mourning
The far-off, unseen places,
I, who gather beauty
As April gathers rains;
Always I am thinking
Of colored, wind-swept spaces,
And the radiant silence
Of unpeopled plains.

I grieve for beauty wasted—
Is there no way to keep it?
God hold it for a lover
Of sky and wind and flower,
And then some autumn twilight
God let him come and reap it;
A million years of splendor
In one breathless hour.

A SONG OF LITTLE STREETS

MY little jeweled, home-strung street, like all the streets in town,
Is filled with shining unsung things, as we go up and down,
And some day I shall write a song, the music and the words,
And I shall tell it out to all the silver-throated birds,
That over every roof, of every house, in every town,
High rockets of bright liquid notes will burst and shower down,
A silver rain of love upon the homes of every street,
Where women stay, and men return, on quick, glad homing feet.

(Because I love them, love them so—the near streets and the far,—
God help me make a song as sweet as little houses are.)

I HAVE A LITTLE HOUSE

I HAVE a little house
Where a shining clock ticks,
And a primrose blooms on the sill.
My braided rugs are as bright
As the brocade of flower beds;
There is a table set in a sunny corner,
And there is a wicker cage
That holds a golden bird.

My blue and white dishes
Glisten on their shelves
Like so many smiling faces,
My teakettle shines and sings;
The yellow bird twirls her golden songs
And brims the room;
Often the scent of fresh, brown-crusted bread
Is there.

At evening—
When a slender moon
Hangs above the roof,
And the steps of slow, home-coming men
Sound on the walk,
My heart hurries with me
To light a flame,
And there—
I make tea in an earthen pot,

I empty honey from a crystal jar,
My brown-crusted bread breaks white and good,
And suddenly—
My song ceases,
My throat aches and my eyes grow dim
With an ancient tenderness:
The old, old sweetness of service
For a man
Who looks at me from the doorway
As if he were glad.

THE PICTURE

THERE hangs upon my wall a single print
That I love so:
A picture of a quaint clean living room
Of long ago,
And in it but the simple things, the poor
Alone may know.

The pewter plates upon the broad grate shelf
Gleam lustrously,
And through the years the wall clock points the same
Sweet hour to me:
Five o'clock—an April afternoon
In Normandy.

And never was sunlight warmer on a sill
Than comes it there,
Beside a western window in a low,
Plain wooden chair
A calm-faced mother sits, the sunlight bright
Upon her hair.

And in her arms there lies a little babe
Lovely to see,
Sweet as the peering blossoms of the old
Gnarled apple tree,
And from her eyes the whole world's deep content
Looks out at me.

Sometimes I am oppressed of many things,
My own affairs
Grow burdensome with strange complexities
That no one shares,
So many useless things within my house,
So many cares,

And often within my heart a sudden throb
Of envy springs:
Of her, her plates, the flowering plant, the child,
A bird that sings.
I covet them—the sweet content, the rest
Of simple things.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

OUR street wakes up at five o'clock
On summer Sunday afternoons.
The little houses stir to life,
A screen door slams, a dog runs out,
A piano voices suddenly
A tinkling sweet tune.
A soft-shod neighbor moves about
On her back porch,
Her ice box opens and I hear
The crisp chip, chip, of ice,
And the cool clink of it
Dropping into a silver pitcher.

Little light-foot shadows run across the lawns,
The periwinkles lift their bright heads up.
A wind begins to stir drowsily in the privet hedges.
I wonder if it, too,
Is waking from its Sunday nap!

A sudden creak of a chair
On a vine-covered veranda,
And the yawning voice of a man, speaking.
Then—parting the silence like the crack of a whip,
A boy's shrill whistle, and down the block
A high, answering call.
And in our house—
Father rising vaguely from his nap,

And fumblingly putting his collar on,
And from the kitchen
The sound of running water,
And mother moving softly about,
Lighting the kitchen fire,
And the quick, delicious smell
Of warming things filling the room.

The wind is wide awake now in the privet hedges,
It turns the misty grey leaves upward,
It laughs—
And blows the curtains teasingly in at the windows.
The room where our table is spread for tea
Is shady and cool,
And brimful of pleasant noises:
The clink of silver,
And the tinkle of water glasses,
And the dear animation of voices
At an evening meal.

THE SPANISH GIRL

SEEING her there in the moonlight one could weep
At the tragically swift blooming of a flower,
A slender shaft of girlhood that will keep
This swaying scarlet beauty but an hour.
Her lips are full-blown poppies flaming bright,
Her lithe and rhythmic body thrills with grace,
Her dusky head thrown backward—eyes alight
With all the fire and sparkle of her race.

And yet I think that she will cling to me,
A brilliant print upon my heart's grey wall,
And turning often I shall pause and see
A jeweled comb—a splotch of crimson shawl,
A flash of gleaming ivory—and a smile
To brighten many a grey and lonely while.

RECOMPENSE

I NEVER have had a look at the sea,
I who would love it so.
I never have watched from the surf-drenched shore
The brave ships come and go.
I do not know how the silent tides
Unfailingly ebb and flow.

But God who is wise to His children's needs,
Gives me the wide low plain,
He gives me the wondrous, whispering grass,
The kildee's sweet refrain,
And my reed-fringed pools are myriad seas,
After the last long rain.

I never have been where the mountains stand
Majestic—aloof—apart—
But nightly the infinite star-crowned heights
Speak to my waiting heart,
And mine are the winds that are mountain-born,
And of seas they are a part.

WINDOWS THAT SHINE

I LIFT a grateful heart for these:
The squares of amber light
That gleam from little curtained worlds
Upon the streets at night:

The yellow latticed squares that glow
To warm me as I pass,
And spread their home-sweet pictures out
Beyond each window glass,

That I may catch a glimpse of rooms
All lovely in the light
Of shaded lamps, where families meet
To warm their hearts at night.

The intimate, dear things in homes—
I mark them as I go:
A shelf of books, a clock, a chair,
A geranium's red glow,

And there I note the simple grace
Of self-forgetful folks:
A woman sews, a man who sits
Beside his fire and smokes,

Small children playing down a hall,
A table spread for tea,

A hungry, happy group breaks bread
Unconscious quite of me.

They in the firelight, and I
Upon the darkened street,
Where little squares of amber light
Make laggards of my feet.

ROADS

I LOVE to think that every road
That winds up hill and down,
Will take one, if one follows it,
At length into the town;
And there the little leaping road
Becomes a twisted street,
A tangled maze of cob-webbed ways
For joyous, seeking feet.
And every crooked street leads out,
If one but walk it far,
Where all the fragrant, furrowed fields
And country-sweet ways are;
But, O, to think that on and on,
The little road runs free—
All up and down, through country, town,
At last—straight to the sea!

Now I have lived so long beside
The leaping road, and I
Have watched behind my lattice shade
The flashing wheels go by,
With none to know that I would go
As joyfully as they
Who pass in my quiet place,
Who laugh, and run away
Along the little wind-swept road,
Up mist-blue hill and down,

To find at length the home-strewn streets,
And byways of the town,
And then—O, think, this old familiar
Road that passes me
Could take me straight and eagerly—
And breathless—to the sea!

MY HEART

MY heart is like a crimson bird
Whose wings beat all day long,
Whose throat will burst, except it sings
Its high ecstatic song.

My heart is like a white-capped wave
That leaps across the bay,
And dashes to its rest at last
In broken, silver spray;

But oftentimes my changing heart
Is like a still brown nest,
Where little soft warm baby things
May snuggle down and rest.

COALING FOR HOME

HERE is a land of dazzling suns,
And the moons tread a magical way;
But the big steamer out in the harbor
Is coaling for home today.
Here are the magical gardens of dreams,
And the silver of moon-tipped pines,
And here are picturesque white-robed priests
Intoning at mystic shrines,
And a surging of life around, about,
All beautiful, strange to me,
But my heart is yearning toward the ship
A-coaling out at sea.

Here little tea houses are massed in green,
And cherry blooms burst on air,
And the purple-plumed wisteria
Waves everywhere, everywhere,
And the weird wind-bells sing low, swing low,
At night when the night winds call,
And old stone lanterns blink tender gleams
Out over the old sea wall.
Here are wonderful temples to strange, strange Gods,
But none to the God of me,
And my heart is yearning toward the ship
A-coaling out at sea.

CARCASSONNE ATTAINED

COULD I once pass near old Limeaux,
And find the road and wander on
Up the far heights as others do
To look on fair, famed Carcassonne,
My eyes would see it lie all white
And blue amid the mountain air,
And I would know, from hearsay, quite
How lovely are the chateaux there.
Then I, a traveler, would fare on;
No autumn work—no vintage blight
Need stay my feet from Carcassonne,—
I would attain that lofty height.
And, though 'tis five long leagues away
Until one reach this Babylon,
With swift, sure strides—a night—a day—
Then might I look on Carcassonne.
The aged peasant thought it long,
He died,—the journey not half done.
Alas! how sad! 'Tis surely wrong
That I, not he, see Carcassonne.

I near the town. The blue-mist light
Rests now on still heights farther on,
The towers are grey—not blue and white,
As looked the far-off Carcassonne.
The road is dusty to my feet;
The sun glares from a brassy sky;

I enter on the public street,
Grave children gaze as I pass by.
The throngs are there, as everywhere,
Each on his own best welfare bent;
The shining robes—the garments fair,
'Twere these the peasant's fancy lent.
I seek the bishop, and I find
A fat man who has dined and supped
Far, far too oft. The generals kind
They tell me, too, have grown corrupt.
Ah, me! I sigh, the cure was right,
Ambition leaves within its wake
A blighted sense,—a sated sight
And disappointment. For the sake
Of the old man who longed to hie
Him forth when autumn's work was done,
I thank the Fates that let him die
Before he looked on Carcassonne.

WASTE PLACES

THE Yucca turns her golden goblets down,
Drained to their bitter dregs,
A lizard, slender, sinuous, scales the mound
On furtive, darting legs.
The harsh, wild grass upon the rocks is old,
Old as its bitter death.
In all this burning desert land
There is no breath.

Yet somewhere—there is cool dark shade, God knows,
And mountain streams where sparkling water flows.

The high exultant sun drips molten gold
Upon the mesa's face,
Above a yellow trail black buzzards hold
Their wide-winged waiting place.
A spotted coil slides from the rocks and down
Beside the fringed mesquite,
And over all the barren waste—
The white-hot heat.

Yet somewhere there is rain along a shore,
And white surf sweeping inward evermore.

THE LAKE AT EVENING

I AM a part of this deep peace tonight.
Far in the distance misty walls and spires,
Mark where the old town lights her evening fires.
Out here God's sunset embers have burned low,
And little flitting fireflies blink and go,
But from far casements in some heavenly town
Two early lighted star lamps glimmer down.

I am a part of this great quietness.
It is so still where wild things go to sleep:
A few brief drowsy sounds—a fish's leap,
And rings upon the water widening far
Out to the lake's edge where the rushes are;
From one tall reed a red-winged blackbird swings;
A frog's wet plunge, a sudden rush of wings—
A bittern flaps his long, low awkward flight
Across the waters to his home tonight.

I am a part of this vast loveliness.
Pale lavender and mauve and deepening grey
And all the tender farewell lights of day
Fade now to velvet darkness and I go
Back to the walled and spired towns, but O—
Here where the wild things stay—peace is so deep—
Dear God, I do not wonder they can sleep.

MOUNTAIN PICTURES

I—Fathers

THE old Mountains
Are like stern fathers,
Showing occasional indulgences
To small children.

To-day—
One of them
Offered me a granite handful
Of tiny bright blue forget-me-nots
From his sky garden,
And I accepted them shyly,
Pleased and proud of his notice.

II—Sunset on the Peaks

The old Mountain Mothers
Are preparing their supper—
They have lighted their scarlet fagots;
They have whipped the far heights
To snowy foam,
And topped them with heavenly cherries,

Now—
Dipping white cloud angels
Come down to sup.

III—The Pines

The Pines
Are the strong sons
Of the mountains,
Vain of their ancestry,
Disdainful in their hardihood,
Wearing their riveted, bronze-cone armors
Like schooled soldiers.

The pale Aspens
Are their sweethearts;
Their delicate green ruffles
Toss in the wind;
Their jade ear-rings
Tinkle coquettishly.
They cling to their lovers in the rain
Slim and sweet and appealingly feminine,
Then, only—
The tall pines take them in their arms,
And kiss their quivering lips
To silence.

IV—The Mountain

"Whosoever shall say unto thee:
Be thou removed,
And be thou cast into the sea,
And doubts not in his heart,
But shall believe,
These things shall come to pass."
O, thou the overwhelming,
And the still unconquered,
Rearing thy crowned head

Among magnificent distances,
Wearing thy royal robes proudly,
Standing unmoved
Before these exquisite,
White vistas,
Have none had faith?

I—an atom—
Palpitant,
Tossed and broken
On the wheel of beauty,
Crumple at thy feet,
Worshiping a million years
Of steadfastness.

Yet—
One says—by a word—
If I doubt not,
I may behold the old sea
Swallow thee.

MY POEMS

MY poems are a pain and a despair,
And a joy without a name—that laughs and sings;
They are a sorrow more than I can bear:
They come to me on little broken wings,
And beat and beat against my aching breast,
And break my heart because they cannot fly:
Poor tired things that come to me for rest,
And plead for me to hold them lest they die.

I think some day that God will heal their wings,
And take my poems—take them one by one,
Each throbbing song that laughs and cries and sings,
And loose them out beyond the farthest sun,
Then like an empty nest on some stark bough,
Perhaps I shall find rest at last—somehow.

ATTITUDES

I HAVE been noisy over little joys,
Noisy as English sparrows in their play,
And querulous and fretful at small griefs,
And aches that spoiled my day;

But I have known a great exultant joy,
And suddenly— I stood so very still,
That I was like a mirrored lake at night,
Or a high tower on a hill;

And I have known—have known a hurt so deep,
That quietly—without a moan or cry —
I have stood still—aloof as a white star,
And watched my own self die.

IT'S HOME, DEARIE, HOME

OH, it's home, dearie, home, that my heart turns to forever,
A little house, a bit of green, upon a quiet street,
White curtains at the windows, and a red bloom peering outward,
And the clicking of the kitchen tiles to my own happy feet.

Ah, it's home, dearie, home, and the singing o' the kettle,
And a table spread at evening time a-waiting there for you,
The early lamp all lighted and the fire burning cheery,
And a soft wind blowing inward from a sweet world wet with dew.

And listen, dearie, close beside a baby in a cradle,
A-swinging low, a-swinging low (I'm singing to him, dear),
Just a little song o' loving like the south wind to the roses:
"It's evening time, and home time, and he will soon be here."

THE GIRL THAT I USED TO BE

SHE came tonight as I sat alone,
The girl that I used to be,
And she gazed at me with her earnest eyes,
And questioned reproachfully:
"Have you forgotten the many plans,
And hopes that I had for you;
The great career, the splendid fame,
All the wonderful things to do?
Where is the mansion of stately height,
With its grounds and its gardens rare,
The silken robes that I dreamed for you,
And the jewels for your hair?"
And as she spoke I was very sad,
For I wanted her pleased with me—
This slender girl from the shadowy past,
The girl that I used to be.

So gently arising I took her hand
And guided her up the stair,
Where peacefully sleeping my babies lay,
Innocent, sweet and fair,
And I told her that they are my only gems,
And precious they are to me;
That my silken robe is my motherhood,
Of costly simplicity,
And my mansion of stately height is Love,
And the only career I know

Is serving each day in its sheltering walls
For the dear ones who come and go.
And as I spoke to my shadow guest,
She smiled through her tears at me,
And I saw that the woman that I am now,
Pleased the girl that I used to be.

SONS OF EARTH

SINCE I have had a son
I cannot pray—
"God keep my son," unless I say:
"God keep all mothers' sons
This day."

Since I have had a son
I cannot see
Another's son hurt needlessly,
But the mother-heart is torn
In me.

All mothers' sons are mine
Since I have had
This grey-eyed, laughing little lad.
I love them all—the good,
The bad.

All mothers' sons are mine,
And so I say:
"God keep the sons of earth this day.
Shield them from needless hurt,
I pray."

SEASONS

IF I were young I would wear pink and silver,
Pink for the dawn, and silver for the sea,
And I would wear pink roses for the morning,
And silver leaves for sheerest ecstasy;
But if the years had worn the glad path deeper,
I would wear soft deep blue, and snowy white:
Blue for velvet midnight on the ocean,
White for the stars at night.

If I were old pale lavender would clothe me,
And quiet grey would be my clinging gowns:
Pale lavender—for slow sweet summer twilights,
Grey for the feathered smoke above old towns.
All lovely shades for every lovely season,
But—last night a girl walked by my side
In pink and silver. I—in my blue garments—
Saw her, and I cried.

I HAVE HELD BEAUTY CLOSE

THERE are nights when my body lies
Laved about with darkness,
And still as utmost silence,
Yet vividly alive as a flame,
And breathless to ecstasy with Beauty.

For my spirit is a vagrant, fleeing thing
That runs barefoot at night upon a silver road
And brings back armloads of Beauty
To shake them out before my eyes
In the soft darkness
Like so many wind-tossed blossoming boughs.

The Beauty—
Of whirring white wings
Circling above an open court,
And the darting scarlet flames of tanagers
Through bright leaves,
And often—
That most wistful, exquisite thing:
A slope blue with the first pale anemones.

Sometimes
My spirit brings me a kaleidoscope
Of Beauty, and holds it for me to see
The shining fragments of forgotten things:
Old landscapes lit by the sun;

WHITE FIRE

Far mooned-white seas with a high wind singing,
And all the bright jewelry of motion that I love:
The long, low sweep of surf on yellow sands;
A wind-swept line of poplars, black
Against a red-gold sky;
The never quiet glee of ruffling winds
Through poppied wheat,
And, O—the rapture of grey sprays on fire
With crimson berries down a winter wood!

Always—my spirit brings back from the silver road
The dazzling white beauty of life itself,
So that my eyes are blinded with its bright nearness.
I reach out swiftly—
And gather it all to my arms,
And hold it close, close to my heart,
Delirious with rapture.

I, who had hoped to touch
But the hem of Beauty's garments.

THE MARSHLAND

WATER and reeds and a rustling wind;
A blackbird tilting a mullein tall,
The circling whir of a night hawk's wings;
A kildee's chirp and a loon's shrill call.

Night coming down on the low marshland,
A star peering out of the western sky,
And floating down from the darkening heights
The plaintive honk of a wild fowl's cry.

No answering call from his nesting mate,
From water or rushes or wet dark loam—
And silhouetted against the sky
A lonely hunter is going home.

THE LITTLE TOWN

O, THE city can never warm me,
And it can never feed me,
But there is a little town I know
That can warm me and feed me too,
And I am sick for the sight of it,
For the flecky golden light of it,
Where the maples arch above the street,
And the yellow sun shines through.

O, the city has sought to hold me,
And it has sought to mold me,
But there is a little town I know,
And there is a little street,
With a small brown house by the side of it,
On a cool green lawn, the pride of it,
And a white walk up to an open door
That waits my returning feet.

And there will be neighbors to greet me,
To run across clean grass to meet me,
And some one will bring me a plateful of cakes,
And a little blue potful of tea,
And my heart will warm with the cheer of it,
All the small town news—I will hear of it—
And I will sit down in a chintz-bright room
Whose walls will smile at me.

PEDRO AND I

PEDRO is brown from the suns of Old Mexico.
His face is pitted from past disease.
He stands in the aisle of a busy store
Before a table heaped with cheap prints.

The pictures have gaudily gilded frames
About fruit more red and yellow
Than ever ripens in earthly orchards.
There are ugly-shaped pitchers
Filled with stiff, unnamable flowers,
And landscapes greener than the greenest spring;

But Pedro does not see them.
His dark smoldering eyes
Have come to rest upon the pictured face
Of the Christ,
His own Christ, hanging tortuously
Upon a jagged cross,
With patient eyes uplifted
In mute agony—for the sins of Pedro.

Involuntarily
The hard rough hands move
To form a cross.

The price is plainly marked above the prints;
So pitifully little—so pitifully much.

There is only a small crumpled bill
In Pedro's soiled pocket:
One dollar—
And it should buy bread and fruit
For Maria, and for little Antonio:
Maria who is often ailing,
And Antonio who hurts Pedro daily
Because he does not run and play
As do the other boys of the street.

Bread and fruit—
Bread—and fruit—
Or—the compassionate, white Christ
To take to the little room
To hang there above a glimmering, lighted candle.

Suddenly—
Into Pedro's troubled eyes there has come quietness.
The crumpled bill passes from his hands.
He grasps his package with reverent fingers,
And is lost from me in the throng,
And someway—
I, who am of another nation, and another creed,
Am close akin to Pedro.
My need is also greater
For the continuous presence
Of the White Christ in my little room,
Than for bread or for fruit—this day.

ETERNAL BEAUTY

WHEN all the poets of the earth have flung
Their ecstasies upon the listening air,
Poems too sweet for any heart to bear
Will cling above old fields and wait—unsung.
Beyond the spaces where the stars are swung
The jealous years will hold forever there
The old amaze, the rapture and despair
To which no poet yet has given tongue.

I need no longer hurry then to make
My small cool songs, for none can take from me
The steadfast sweetness of the blue hill mist,
The ancient wonder that the white stars wake,
There will be poems through eternity,
With God—the ultimate anthologist.

THE CITY IS A LADY

THE city is a lady
All jeweled for the night,
With silver slippers on her feet,
And buckles flashing bright,
The long streets are her broidered gown,
With bright threads running up and down.

The city is a lady;
She holds her proud head high,
Her veil is misty purple dusk,
It trails against the sky;
And when it blows against her face,
She pins it with a star—in place.

The city is a lady;
She wears a low cut gown,
And from her lovely throat a rope
Of shining pearls hangs down,
Her dusky hair is spangled bright,
Her girdle is of gold tonight.

The city is a lady;
And she is wondrous proud,
She loves to hold her haughty head
Above the gaping crowd;
But wait—tomorrow you will see
Her dressed as plain as plain can be.

FRUITS OF THE SUN

GOD bless the man who plants a tree
To feed his fellow-man;
God bless all those who bring to fruit
By toil and labored plan
The red and gold globes of the sun,
That others may be fed;
Bless all who make of this green earth
A fruiting fountain-head.

God bless the man who trusts the earth
To give him back reward—
Who makes a garden, row on row—
Replenish him, O Lord!
And may he bring at market time
Heaped baskets to the town—
His offering for tables spread
Where tired folks sit down.

God bless the man who plows a field
And sows the yellow wheat—
Who plants the barley and the corn
Our hungry children eat;
God bless all those who bend beneath
The weight of daily toil,
Whose fate is linked for good or ill
With sun and wind and soil.

We thank Thee, Lord, that men who strive
In lowly, earthy ways,
Receive from Thee rich measurings
And laden harvest days.
Grant them the faith to plant again,
When harvest time is done—
The gold fruits of the open air—
The red fruits of the sun.

CAVALIERS

HOW do we deem these wide plains commonplace,
Or think the old hills barren of desire,
When Romance walks them with uplifted face,
And Passion leaps them like a living fire?
Do we forget once streams ran liquid gold,
And high Adventure stalked the silver wind?
Heedless of danger—reckless—eager—bold—
Men rode and fought and laughed and dreamed and sinned,
And loved—mad loves, and little loves and light,
Under the love-mad white moons of the South,
Hard men who fought all day and danced all night,
And died at daybreak for a scarlet mouth?

Are Maximilian—Miramon—Marquez—
Sweet sounding syllables and nothing more?
"Hill of the Bells" some pleasant, unknown place?
Carlotta—but a name not heard before
Magruder—Shelby—Maury—where are they?
The plains forget, the old hills cease to know,
That once high-hearted, arrogant and gay,
These men of fire rode out to Mexico;
The sun a glory and the wind high bliss,
While dark eyes dimmed and red lips drooped that day,
And many a white hand fluttered with a kiss,
And many a heart broke as they marched away.
They fought—and no man ever died, 'tis said,
But the wail of some hurt woman rent the air—

Love—is it done? And Romance—is it dead?
And stalks there no Adventure anywhere?

SONNETS OF A SOUTHERN CITY

I—Morning Magic

HOW have you grown so lovely over night,
My city of pale mists and circling wings?
If I could catch this brief, translucent light,
Or sing one song your serried skyline sings;
If I could set some swift appraisal down
To hold this mood, this white look of a bride,
That lies like holy magic over town,
I think at last I should be satisfied.

It soon will pass—the moment that was mine—
A heart-beat—a quick breath—and now I know
I have no words for this—no words that shine
To make a white page gleam and glint and glow.
No gold words can I borrow—none will lend,
And I have but dull copper coins to spend.

II—Babel

Thrusting itself up through the heat and haze
This Babel spreads its wings to reach the sun.
The little men who builded, stop to raise
Awed, blood-shot eyes to mark what they have done.
A million strident voices cleave the air;
Our language is confounded—while man seeks
In anguish for an old lost joy, and there
Is none to understand the thing he speaks.

We have grown bold with living—drunk with power;
We have forgot the plains strong men have trod;
The flash and fret and glint of one brief hour
Has taken on the form and face of God.
God help us—who have grown so dull and blind
To speak once more the language of our kind.

III—Pomegranate Blossoms

Here in the marvelous half-dusk of the South
An Oriental bush flames out with fire,
Each blossom is a lover's scarlet mouth,
Each petal is a blinding, swift desire.
The passion flower of the East has stirred
To quick red flame the smoldering southern night,
A man's persistent, eager voice is heard,
He pleads with one—"Return, O, Shulamite."
The park becomes a garden of a king,
And older than life—the lover's call sounds on.
Faint scents of spikenard and saffron bring
The breath of winds that blow from Lebanon,
And the fire of a red pomegranate flower
Makes me a prince's daughter for an hour.

KITCHENS

I NEVER knew a man who did not like
A kitchen fire,
Nor a woman, if she be away awhile,
But would tire
Of inns and servants, and would long to be
Back in her own kitchen, buttering toast,
And making tea.

I know a kitchen where staid four-o'clocks
Bloom at the door,
And the honey-colored lights lie dappled bright
Along the floor,
Above a flame a copper kettle sings
The comforting sweet song of all serene
And gracious things.

The drain boards at the sink are scrubbed as white
As ocean sands;
The dotted ruffled curtains are drawn back;
A basket stands
Heaped high with yellow apples, and the smell
Of the whole room is clean, like garments washed
And ironed well.

And I can take a yellow bowl and beat
White eggs to foam,

And I can mark the clock's face for the time
A man comes home,
To find me there—contentment in his look,
For he, like every man, delights to watch
A woman cook.

THE MARKET

MY Southern city has smoldered all day,
But tonight the little blessed winds are blowing.

I take my woven basket,
Light with old Mexican reeds,
And go to the open market.
There is no place in all the city
So wholesome and so full of color.
Tonight the booths are as vivid
And as picturesque as a carnival.

I delight to weave in and out
Among the bright tables,
Dealing with limpid eyed Greeks
Whose teeth flash smilingly at me.
I love the clink of the silver coins,
And the sound of the water sprinklers,
Like dripping rain in a garden.
I select with care
From accurate, colored pyramids,
Rubbed glittering red apples,
And sun-bronzed oranges from California,
And a few fragrant lemons.

For the sheer joy of it
I buy a bunch of golden carrots
With delicate fringed leaves,

And two glistening, red-skinned onions
For seasoning.
I have room in my basket
For a bag of cool yellow wax beans,
And several gleaming scarlet peppers.
Because they hold the sweetness of wild places,
I purchase with delight, green water cresses,
Crisp-leaved and sparkling from the sprinklers.

And then—
Because I can carry no more
I tarry a moment
Watching a young Italian mother
Sitting on a low step, suckling her babe,
Her white breast bared.
She does not know that I am watching her,
Her laughing lips are the color of crimson poppies,
On her cheeks is the cream of magnolia petals,
And in her passionate eyes
Is the beauty of southern dusk,
Troubling me vaguely
With the sweetness of something that I have known.

I stand before a wire coop
Filled with white, fluffy-breasted pigeons,
With soft eyes.
Other women are buying them greedily for their tables.
I do not buy them,
The memory of their grey-tipped wings would choke me,
I love white pigeons.

It cools me deliciously
To stand before a tankful of melons,
Floating on ice.

I see a young negro boy,
His face buried to the ears
In the luscious, cold, red heart of a melon,
And I am glad for him.

Then—I go back a clanging street
To my home;
But I carry with me
More than a basket of bright fruit and vegetables.

SONGS

IF I were told that I must go tonight,
Up to the country of the blessed dead,
With half my songs unsung, and all these white
Sheer things of beauty in my heart unsaid—
I would be chilled and sad a little while.
My lover, Life, has held me tenderly,
But I would kiss his red lips—I would smile,
And a door would close forever after me.

A flying white joy then, O, I would run,
Ahead of all the heavenly winds and fling
A thousand songs up to the heavenly sun,
A thousand songs that I have longed to sing,
And God, Himself, would smile to see me pass,
So swift and glad across the heavenly grass.

THE RAINS AT CUSHENDALL

ALWAYS the rain comes beating slant the windows of the town,
And it's cold I am with hearing it, a-pelting, pounding down,
It minds me of a little child a-crying in its bed,
A-searching for the breast of her a-lying stark and dead,
And never to be comforted except she stirs to take
It close again, to hold again, and she to never wake,
And she to never wake.

Ah, the rain in town—I'm sick of it, it minds me not at all
Of how it comes across the farthest hills to Cushendall,
A-closing in, a-closing in, all grey and still and slow,
I'd up and go to meet it now—If I had leave to go.
My grief! it be not like the rain a-pelting in the town,
I'd like me well to feel it come a-trembling, dripping down,
A-trembling, dripping down.

And 'twould be good to smell again the bluebells hanging wet.
'Tis often that I wake o' nights a-wishing to forget
How far away is Cushendall with all its gentle rains,
The pavements be not like the cart-ruts glimmering down the lanes,
It is thrushes and not Klaxons through the glens at Cushendall,
And heart o' me—I never felt me lonesome there at all,
Nor cold was I at all.

ON A MAY MORNING

SOMETIMES
Upon one of God's May mornings,
I wonder, if up in the Holy city
With all its radiant splendor
Of precious stones:
Of scintillating topaz and beryl and amethyst,
And the marvelous luster of its golden streets,
Some saint does not turn half wistfully,
Recalling an earthly morning like this.

I wonder—if the same sweet provision
Is theirs that is ours:
The blessedness of forgetting old sorrows,
And the weariness of old roadways,
As a mother forgets her anguish
Upon beholding the new-born babe at her breast.

And so—if I were in Heaven
I do not believe that God would mind
If I looked back at times
Recalling the sweetness of a May day in an old orchard,
With apple blossoms
Like little pink and white clouds at dawn
Fragrant above my head,
And the bright grass beside the path
Tender and cool to my feet.

How could I forget
Distant blue hills misty with clover,
And fluttering white poppies in the grass
Upon high, wind-swept cliffs,
Or forget the clustered gold of yellow roses
On a bush beside an old gate?

And I am told
There is no night there,
Nor need of candle for lighting—

I believe—I would remember often
The sweetness of summer dusk
Across moist fields,
And fireflies, bright in the green darkness
Of a little yard,
And white curtains stirring softly
In a square of yellow lamplight.
I am sure—
Amid all the holy beauty of Heaven,
I would recall—with catching breath—
A quiet room—a smooth white bed,
And starlit darkness,
And a young girl
Kneeling at an open window—to pray.

IF I COULD

IF I could make a poem shine
As it shines in me,
The proud white stars would stop—amazed,
Would look and see
My lovely light, and turn away
To envy me.

If I could sing a song as sweet
As in me sings,
The circling, joy-mad lark would pause
On sun-tipped wings
To catch the sky-high, rapturous notes
My red heart flings.

If I could make a canvas gleam
And pulse and glow,
As these upon my soul's white walls,
This thing I know,
The world would stand with bated breath,
And love it so.

YOUTH

YOUTH passed me by before I knew
That youth was sweet,
She tripped across the summer days
With dancing feet,
Her lithe young body slim and strong,
Her red lips parted with a song,
A girl with dusky, wind-blown hair, —
My own youth lost somewhere.

How could I know that youth was sweet?
A world away
The white lights beckoned me to come,
None bade me stay,
The blue mist on the mountain height,
The rapturous silver stars at night,
The red enchantment of the dawn,
Everything—called me on.

I did not know that youth was sweet,
But now I know,
I watch them pass—young, star-eyed girls,
And love them so.
They do not see me as they pass,
Their feet are swift upon the grass,
The far lights beckon them away—
And I—would bid them stay.

HOME TO NAZARETH

COARSE harsh cloth for His swaddling clothes,
And rough-stemmed hay for the Christ-child's bed,
And the only lamp, a star that shone
Through the rafters overhead;

But Mary pillowed the little form
On an arm as soft as a white dove's breast,
And she shaped the hay with her gentle hands
Into a soft dove's nest.

And she thought of a room in Nazareth,
Of a white bed under the eaves of sod—
Strange that she should have given birth
Here to the son of God;

Strange these coarse, harsh swaddling clothes
On the tender flesh of her little one,
When there were robes in a cedar chest,
Cedar from Lebanon.

"I will take thee home, my little son,"
Mary the beautiful mother said,
"I will take thee home to my small clean room,
Home to a soft clean bed,

"And I will open a fragrant chest,
Which Joseph, thy carpenter-father made,
In it are fine twilled linen slips,
And a woolly coat is laid;

"Fine twilled linen from silver flax,
And fleecy wool from a snow white sheep—
Yea, we will go home through the starry dusk,
Sleep, my little one, sleep."

MY HEARTH FIRE

O HEART of mine, the night is cold,
The little moon is pale,
The chimney wind sings out an old
And bitter tale,
The white surf beats on rocks that hold
The white ghosts of a sail.

But I must turn me from my door,
'Tis lonely there tonight.
My heart's hearth fire must blaze and roar,
Glow red and bright,
And I will call them in once more,
My friends across the night.

And thus they come—each one his place—
My fire burns cheerily,
I turn to one a laughing face,
He laughs with me,
Another—Ah, with him I trace
Some worn, faint memory.

I share with one my ancient grief;
One comforts me indeed;
Another chants his strange belief;
My sacred creed;
With but a hand-clasp, tender, brief,
One meets my crying need.

WHITE FIRE

Yea, my hearth fire is steadfast, bright,
For each mile-weary guest,
They reach and warm them close tonight,
I, too, am blest,
They close me in with life and light —
(Awhile the white ghosts rest).

EVENING

WHEN I go home across the hills at evening,
My little flock of dreams all gathered in—
A gentle peace and quietness will settle
Along the pathways where I late have been.
I will look backward and be glad, remembering
My perfect day, my lovely, wondrous day,
Forgetting then the high noon's fretful glaring,
The weariness of soul, the dusty way.
I will forget the climb to distant hilltops;
I will forget the chasms I have crossed,
And, O, I trust that I will have forgotten
Each little dream-white lamb that I have lost.

When I go home across the hills at evening,
One far, clear twilight bell will call to prayer,
And I will pause on some green close-cropped hillside,
And with high lifted face will worship there.
I will tell Him, the great, good listening Shepherd,
How I have loved my beautiful, bright day:
The shell-pink sweetness of the dawning morning,
The flower faces that have starred my way;
The truant playing winds across the valleys;
The tender green within the crannied wall;
The stillness of the far, cloud ship a-sailing—
The poignant beauty of a wild bird's call;

And suddenly—the first faint star will tremble,
A crescent moon will smile down tenderly—
And there, at last—through the soft purple twilight—
The near, dear lights of home will shine for me.

NIGHT IN NEW MEXICO

I SHALL spread my blanket under the stars tonight,
On a high green hilltop—close to the leaning sky,
With only the moon on a sycamore for a light,
And only the winds of God to pass me by.
I shall feel alone—and as clean as a wave-washed shore—
On the top of a universe—whirling among the stars—
I shall forget a low roof, and a closed door,
And old hewn streets—their tumults and their scars.

I shall be healed by the passing winds of God,
And I shall be cool, at last, as the moon-cooled tree;
I shall grow as strong as the fragrant hilltop sod,
There with the near, white stars sailing over me,
I shall spread my blanket smoothly—I shall lie down
A mile above the sea—and miles from a town.

DUSK ON THE HILL ROAD

THE long sweet twilit roadway of the hills:
A shy star trembling on the farthest crest;
Deep nested valleys where the still dusk fills
With slow far-reaching shadows of the west.
Tender and white a little moon hangs low,
Glinting a winding river silver-grey,
Amber and pink the sun's faint afterglow
Brushes the heights, then slowly dies away,
And down the dew-wet fragrant dusk the road
Goes on unhindered where the sumac glows,
And gleaming goldenrod nods with its load.
And here—the crimson berry of the rose
And now the greatest height where far lands lie
All velvet-soft within the twilight grey,
Vast distances and silences, and high
Thoughts lifted like as holy ones who pray.
And here a valley where the breezes blow
The faint warm breath of freshly upturned loam,
A lighted lamp across the fields—and lo—
The one who came the hill road has come home.

RESURRECTION

MY heart is like an altar
Between two slender glimmering candles,
And over it always
The picture of the white Christ.

Sometimes—
He looks out at me
With the same white compassion
He turned toward her who knelt to touch
His garment's hem that day.
Again, I see Him as He sat
Upon the doorstep of summer evenings,
The courteous, gentle guest
Of the friends at Bethany,
And often—He is looking down at me
From above the heads of many little children.

But—last Friday—toward evening,
I saw him hanging on a jagged cross,
His patient eyes uplifted
In unutterable agony,
And then—
I could not lift mine own eyes
For heaviness,
And almost—my candles flickered out.

I cupped them with my hands
Until their flames brightened,
And lo—today—
With the dawn not yet on the hills,
I see Him standing
White—among white lilies,
In an old garden of lilies,
And beside Him an open sepulcher!
The little candles leap with radiance,
My eyes are no longer burdened with heaviness
I am breathless as a running child.

And somewhere—
High within the temple of my soul
The exultant voice of a great choir is lifting:
"He is not dead! He is not dead!
For He liveth, Alleluia!
And shall live from everlasting,
Unto everlasting, Amen,
And Amen."

THE ENDURING THINGS

I WILL lay hold upon enduring things.
I am wearied with the din and noise and fret.
About me close, distracting, meager things
Grapple my soul—Lord help me to forget
The clamor of it. Grant me peace that stills,
Deep peace of quietness, and hope that cheers.
I lift my eyes to Thy strength-giving hills,
Steeped in the light of far eternal years.

I will lay hold upon enduring things:
Faith that illumines though the eyes be blind,
And joy continuous, a heart that sings,
And love that suffers long—yet still is kind.
They are such paltry things I've bartered for,
I am soul-sick with the weariness it brings.
Now—with high lifted face I turn me, for
I will lay hold upon enduring things.

AFTER AWHILE

WHEN I am dead
Give me the things I crave,
Clean winds, and cool clipped grass,
And a tall brave pine tree at my head,
And this beside—
A little path awhile
Leading to where I lie,
Under the cool green grass,
Under the high blue sky,
Where the poor that I have known,
And the piteous halt and blind
May find their way to me,
May pause by my side and say:
"We are sorry she went away,
We loved her, for she was kind."

These things I choose when life is spent
For my enduring monument.

THE CONTINUING VOICE

HOW shall my voice speak after I am gone
Into the company of the ever living?
I shall not leave behind a silent void
Remembering me no more, I shall be giving
Utterance still to some persistent speech.
And shall they, listening, say: "Our friend is voicing
Her bravest song of courage and of cheer,
The same sweet song she sang while she was here?"

How shall my voice speak after I am gone?
Shall they not say: "Our friend loved life and laughter,
And all the little gentle things of earth:
Bright April rains and sunshine coming after,
And flowers on the hills and homes at night?"
And shall they say: "We know our friend remembers,
For often—when the wind is down the slope,
We hear her voice—like some far beckoning hope?"

God grant my voice speaks thus when I am gone,
Harking backward from the starry places,
Grant it may cheer some traveler faring on,
That they who listen—turn with lifted faces,
And eyes grown luminous—because I speak.
God help me that I ever may remember
When each new day I sing my song again,
That as I now sing—so shall I sing then.